



Sen. Jim Honeyford



Rep. Bruce Chandler



Rep. Dan Newhouse

15th District Legislative Update



Toll-free Legislative Hotline:
1-800-562-6000

Dear friends,

The 2005 legislative session has come to a close and we're happy to be back home catching up on our farm work and talking to people back home about state government issues. Knowing you're all as busy as we are this time of year, we hope you'll take a few minutes to learn more about how we worked to represent your interests in Olympia.

It was definitely not an easy session with one political party controlling the Legislature and governor's office. We had successes in some areas, but experienced frustration in the lack of a bipartisan approach on important issues such as health care, creating jobs for all areas of Washington, election reform and budget decisions.

As one Puget Sound area lawmaker put it, "This was the best Democratic session I've seen in a decade! It was a Seattle session!"

While we didn't agree with much that came out of Olympia this year, it could have been worse. We'll tell you about some bad bills that we prevented from passing this year and some of the good bills we supported.

As always, we are honored to serve the 15th Legislative District. We welcome your ideas and comments as we move forward.

Sincerely,

Jim Honeyford
State Senator

Bruce Chandler
State Representative

Dan Newhouse
State Representative

Inside:

- New construction in our district
- Preparing for a drought
- Excessive spending
- Higher gas taxes
- Job building for Washington
- Damage control on state regulations
- Key votes



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New construction in our area

One area where lawmakers took a bipartisan approach to meet the needs of our entire state was the capital construction budget. The result was a fiscally sound budget that adheres to the state's debt limit. Our communities received funding for several projects, including:

- \$28.6 million for replacement of the Glenn/Anthon Hall at the Yakima Valley Community College;
- \$4.1 million for the Raymond Hall renovation at YVCC;
- \$1 million for the Center for Workforce Education at YVCC;
- \$350,000 for Beacon Rock State Park;
- \$50,000 for the Buena Library;
- \$1 million for the NW Communities Education Center in Granger;
- \$450,000 for the Alder Creek Carousel Museum in Bickleton; and
- \$4 million for the Yakima Town Center restoration.



Beacon Rock State Park

courtesy Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Investment in these projects will improve education resources, help maintain recreational opportunities and provide new construction jobs in our district.

Preparing for a drought

Warmer-than-normal weather and a record low snowpack in the mountains prompted our efforts to develop a state response to help farmers and other water users in the face of a potentially serious water shortage.

Rep. Newhouse introduced legislation that was signed into law creating the Joint Legislative Committee on Water Supply During Drought. This committee will help allocate relief funds and make recommendations to agencies to assist those affected by the drought.

At the urging of many of us, the governor in March declared a state drought emergency, activating a number of tools to help ease the impacts, including:

- Expedited emergency water rights transfers;
- Expedited temporary permits to access emergency wells and dead storage to maintain established water use; and
- Grant and loan funding to help preserve agricultural and community water supplies, while maintaining adequate stream flows. These funds can also be used to purchase water rights and/or finance emergency infrastructure to access water.

The state construction budget provides \$8.2 million to help the Department of Ecology in drought preparedness and \$1.47 million to purchase water rights and leases so those who need water the most can get it.

Water buyers and sellers have a new place to meet on the Internet. In an effort to help people who need water during this year's drought connect with those who have water to lease or sell, the Department of Ecology has established a Web page called the Washington Water Exchange. The exchange may be accessed by going to the state's drought site at www.WashingtonDrought.org.

15th District Legislative Update

Excessive spending defines budget

Legislature abandons fiscal discipline

Many politicians, including Gov. Christine Gregoire, who ran for office on a “no-new-taxes” pledge, changed their tunes once they were elected, claiming “no-new-taxes” really only applies to general taxes, like the sales tax, property tax or the B&O tax.

Despite growth in existing revenue of \$1.7 billion over the previous budget, the Legislature failed to create a priority-based budget that would have prevented any new tax increases.

The Legislature could have increased spending by 7 percent over the last budget with no new taxes whatsoever. Instead, the Legislature repealed the state spending limit law, raised taxes by more than \$400 million and shortchanged the state’s pension fund by another \$325 million in order to pay for a 12 percent budget increase.

Despite our push for a no-new-taxes budget, the governor and the majorities in both the House and Senate all proposed budgets that called for tax increases and double-digit spending growth. Still worse,

instead of finding middle ground, they reached a final “compromise budget” by spending over \$40 million more than any budget previously introduced this session. It would seem the only compromise made was by the taxpayers.

RIP I-601: Governor signs bill clearing the way for tax hikes

In 1993, voters revolted against a huge tax increase and approved Initiative 601 to limit growth in government spending and make it harder to raise taxes. This session, Gov. Gregoire signed a measure to overturn I-601, making it easier to raise taxes and increase spending. Lawmakers then proceeded to raise taxes with a simple —and partisan—majority vote instead of the two-thirds majority originally required by I-601.

The People’s Budget: A better way

Simply voting “no” isn’t good enough. We know you demand more. That’s why we supported an alternative budget released by the Senate Republican budget lead. Here’s an overview of the “People’s Budget,” which funds our top priorities without raising taxes:

Education

- Fully funds voter-approved education initiatives without the tax increases required in the Democrat budget
- Fully funds levy equalization which was cut in the final budget by \$12.9 million

Higher Education

- More than 10,000 new enrollments — compared to 7,900 in the Democrat budget
- Increases financial aid availability to middle class families

Health Care

- Protects nursing home funding
- Maintains access to care by supporting state funding for health care providers

- Continues verification efforts for Medicaid to protect funding for eligible patients

Pensions

- Sound and systematic funding – keeping the commitment to employees
- Makes payments to unfunded liabilities to prevent costly lawsuits

Environment and Parks

- Eliminates state parks day fees
- Prevents raiding of environmental cleanup funds

Compensation

- Funds collective bargaining agreements for state workers in exchange for greater government efficiencies

Fiscal Responsibility

- Nearly triples the ending fund reserve to prevent future budget shortfalls
- Protects and enhances critical services with no new taxes

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Legislature repeals historic unemployment insurance reforms

The centerpiece of our job recovery plan approved two years ago was the carefully crafted changes to our unemployment insurance system that Sen. Honeyford and Rep. Chandler worked to negotiate. The reforms, approved by Republicans and Democrats and signed by Gov. Locke, increased fairness for all workers and took steps toward reducing our state's high unemployment costs.

Unfortunately, that law was repealed this year, reducing benefits for year-round workers who are laid off through no fault of their own and giving higher benefits for seasonal workers who simply use the unemployment system to supplement their income.

Sen. Honeyford supported a Senate amendment to provide a \$75-per-week stipend to help seasonal workers without raising rates and without jeopardizing the solvency of the fund. Unfortunately, this amendment was rejected and the 2003 reforms were overturned.

The bill calls for a study to revisit these changes in two years. We hope all parties can work together in good faith to find a solution that is responsible and fair to all.



Representative Chandler

Higher gas taxes

Coupled with the increased taxes in the general budget, people will also see a tax increase at the fuel pump at a time when fuel prices are at an all-time high!

While we're pleased the final transportation budget included funding for independent performance audits,

we simply could not consider approving an additional 9.5-cent gas tax when the Legislature was also raising taxes on the general budget side.

Another reason we chose not to vote for the package is because so much of the money goes to Seattle and King County.

What does this mean to you?

If you drive a three-quarter-ton pickup about 15,000 miles per year, you'll pay an additional \$142.50 after the entire 9.5-cent gas tax is phased in by 2008. You'll also pay another \$30 in the form of a vehicle weight fee.*

If you drive a Ford Taurus, you'll pay another \$71.50 a year once the tax is fully phased in and you'll also pay \$10 in weight fees.

Drivers' license fees will also increase from \$10 to \$20.

**Farm vehicles are exempt from the gross weight fee.*



Sen. Zarelli and Sen. Honeyford

Senator Jim Honeyford

Rep. Bruce Chandler • Rep. Dan Newhouse

Damage control:

It was a disappointing session on many fronts but it could have been much, much worse. We were able to prevent passage of several bills that would have diminished your rights and your paycheck:

- In a sad display of political payback, some legislators were supporting a bill to cripple the state's retrospective rating — or retro — program, a worker safety program that rewards employers who provide an injury-free workplace.
- Another bill would have levied a 2-cents-per hour tax on all workers to create a new state-run family leave program.
- Legislators also tried to pass a costly “pay-or-play” bill which would have forced all employers to pay a fee to the state to move more people on to government-run health care at a cost to business of \$1.6 billion. This would have been a job killer for Washington.

- Finally, legislators introduced several bills to limit your Second Amendment right to bear arms. Citizens crowded hearing rooms to oppose these bills, which died in committee.



Representative Newhouse

Key votes:

	Honeyford	Chandler	Newhouse
• Prescription drug assistance foundation (SB 5558)	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Capital construction budget (SB 6094)	Yes	Yes	Yes
• \$26 billion state operating budget (SB 6090)	No	No	No
• 9.5 cent gas tax increase (SB 6103)	No	No	No
• Reducing unemployment benefits for year-round workers (HB 2255)	No	No	No
• Death tax (6096)	No	No	No
• Overturning Initiative 601 tax and spending limits (SB 6078)	No	No	No
• Requiring photo identification to vote (SB 5499—amendments)	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Joint Legislative Drought Committee (HB 2166)	Yes	Yes	Yes

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**We'd like to
hear from you!**

If you have ideas, concerns or questions, please feel free to contact us here in Olympia. We can also help you in your dealings with state government.

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*Contact Sen. Honeyford to receive his
biweekly legislative update in the mail or
via e-mail—or visit his Web site at
www.src.wa.gov/senators/honeyford.htm*

*For more news from the House Republican
Caucus, visit <http://hrc.leg.wa.gov>*

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